A K S H A

The word <u>Aksha</u> occurs earliest in the <u>Rigveda</u>,[1] where it meant either 'horse' or 'the axle of the earth' according to Macdonall and Kieth.[2] The modern lexicons give its meaning 'an axle', 'gambling die', 'an organ of sense' or 'sensual perception'.[3]

In the works on medicine, <u>Aksha</u> is called as a weight. In <u>Charak-Saṁhitā</u> by Charaka, who flourished in the times of Kanishka (<u>circa</u> first Century A.D.), it is mentioned as a weight of 12 <u>Māshas</u>. According to Vāgbhatta II (circa 9th Century A.D.) it was a weight of 16 Māshas. Yādavaprakāśa, a lexicographer of 11th Century A.D. also, in his <u>Vaijayanti</u>, refers to <u>Aksha</u> as a weight and there too it is said as an equivalent to 16 <u>Māshas</u>, but if <u>Māsha</u> of his time was the same as that of Vāgbhatta II is by no means certain.

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1. <u>Rigveda</u>, I. 164. 13; X.53.7.
2. <u>Vedic Index</u>, I, p.1.
3. Monier Williams, <u>Sanskrit English Dictionary</u>, p.3.
4. षण्डिका ते तु चत्वारस तश्चतुरस्तु माषकः।
   हेमश्च धानकश्चो श्रो भवेच्छाणास्तु ते त्रयम्।।
   शाणौ द्वौ द्रंक्षणं विद्यात्कोलं बदर मे बच।
   विद्यात्द्वौ द्रंक्षणौ कार्ष्ण सुवर्णम् च वक्षमेव च।।

   Charaka-Saṁhitā (N.S.P.ed.), p.675.
5. Ashṭāṅga-hridaya, Dravya-Kalpa, Chapter VI; N.S.P. ed. p.775.
6. Oppert's Edition, p. 189.

Perhaps Aksha was well known as weight amongst the medical people. In a sixteenth century work on medicine called Bhāvaprakāśa, Aksha finds mention as a weight. How and why this name was given to the weight is no where mentioned. But in a modern Hindi lexicon, Aksha is said to be the same as Rudrāksha; a kind of wild berry which is used for rosaries. If it is so, it might be that the berry was used for weight and in course, the name was adopted for a particular weight.

Aksha was also known as coin appears from a story in the Brihat-Kathā-Kośa, which was compiled in the ninth Century A.D. It is referred to there in the context of sale and purchase. As a coin, it might be of copper, since the transaction relates only to the purchase of a small quantity of gram. As coin, it would have naturally derived its name from the weight; and as such it might be of the 16 Māshas weight.

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7. D.P.Sharma, Hindi-Sabdārtha-Parijata, p.3.

8. Brihat-Kathā-Kośa, Story no.76, line 23.